



COPENHAGEN LEGAL TECH LAB — PODCAST

EPISODE 07 – Embracing Innovation in the Legal Industry

In this episode, Nick Hawtin, Legal Tech expert, and Ulf Lindén, one of the founders of LegalWorks Nordic, discuss how to further embrace innovation, especially in law firms, and continue bringing legal industry closer to the people.

00:00:00 Intro music

00:00:08,240

Nick Hawtin

Hello and welcome to the Copenhagen Legal Tech Lab podcast, where we address innovation and the law from three angles people, technology, and business. I'm Nick Hawtin. And today we're here at the Law Innovation and Vulnerability Conference at the Faculty of Law at the University of Copenhagen. Together with Ulf Lindén.

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Ulf Lindén

Hello, nice to be here, Nick. Away from where do you work? I'm from Stockton, working with LegalWorks Nordic. An alternative legal player in the Nordics. We have offices in Stockholm and Gothenburg. And we have people all over Sweden. And we are very flexible organisation.

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Nick Hawtin

They're everywhere. You are everywhere, and you work with an awful lot of experience. Also, let's say there a lot of people in legal tech that are young, bright eyed, bushy tailed, optimistic. I like to say that I have seen a lot of stuff and we've got a lot of experience. We've got the scars to prove it. You run a really cool conference up in Stockholm called Nordic Legal Tech Day.

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Ulf Lindén

Yeah, and it's actually in Helsinki, Oslo and Copenhagen as well. So, it's a concept that we developed like seven years ago, and it's been growing since then, and we see huge interest in these topics, and I think the industry is finally getting in the right direction.

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Nick Hawtin

I love your conferences because I always end up not hearing very many of the talks because there's so many interesting people, though, that I get stuck by the coffee machine.

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Ulf Lindén

Yeah, it's the network is really the key. And it's a great platform together, all kinds of people, for all the corners of the industry to meet for a day and network. And you always leave those days with a lot of new contact.

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Nick Hawtin

There's always find I got, like, three or four things that I keep repeating based on that I got from that particular day where somebody said something that encapsulated in a single sentence, a concept or something we would have been working on for hours.

You were in a session just an hour ago, and I had a couple of things that I thought were really interesting. It was panel on innovation in law firms and how to change. And you're not with a traditional three last name Law firm?

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Ulf Lindén

No. Yeah, that's correct. But we have a law firm inside our group, our family, as we call it. And we have 25 lawyers servicing clients, reviewing contracts, giving legal advice and so on. And at the same time, we have a couple of tech platforms that have developed. One is in the corporate record and transaction space based on blockchains. And we have LegalBuddy which is an online service for start-ups and entrepreneurs.

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Nick Hawtin

When I hear these things, so you got a new structure, you've got a flexible structure. You've got tech integrated from the start. There's even the buzzword of all buzzwords: blockchain. You had a really good line, and I'd love to you expand a little bit on it about how, yes, it's a new structure, yes, there's new technology, but it's the same lawyers. Lawyers grew up inside the current system. You have a challenge. You have a same cultural challenge with the culture and getting them to innovate.

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Ulf Lindén

The lawyer culture is very strong. If you look at the people who studied law, they have top grades through the school system. They go to university; they fight about the grades, getting absolutely top grades to get into the top law firms and they're, you know, performing at the top level at the end of the day become a partner. So, you really raised into the competition. And that, of course, make creates challenges when you need to collaborate and in all the developments projects collaborations is really the key word. No one can run a new product development project alone. You need to be a different a diverse group with a lot of different competences. You need the lawyers; you need the tech people, and you need those in between. So, collaboration it is a bit of a challenge for many lawyers that they look at the sort of the personal output every day, every hour measured individually.

So, I believe firmly that a sort of disruption in the legal industry will not happen in in the law firms because this culture is so strong with the classic partner structure and the billable hour incentives. So, we have been fortunate to be able to create a new organisation from the scratch. I think that's where we will see disruption. And I think we will see many more of firms which are considered to be alternative, growing up in the future.

But as we discussed, one of the challenges you have is that we need the lawyers. I mean, they are already the core of whatever we do, and they and they're raised in this system. And it takes quite a while to unlearn, to make the lawyers to relax a bit and, you know, understand that perfection is not the standard in everything you do. It's really important to have the courage to fail when you're into product development.

But, you know, the lawyers that really wanted to be perfect. The first shot should be perfect directly.

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Nick Hawtin

I definitely understand the challenge, because when you talk to a lawyer, they don't do law. "I don't work as a lawyer. I am a lawyer".

When it comes to perfection, sometimes I wonder, that they accept that the law isn't perfect. When a law is made, they expect technology to be perfect. But when a law is made, well, then they expect the interpretations to build a pattern. The law iterates. But the technology has to be perfect for forever. From the beginning.

I think they could fit the pattern and you give them a new paradigm to work with when they look at how technology works, and it's built and develops.

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Ulf Lindén

Yeah. I mean, the law is not perfect. Every lawyer knows that. It's quite robust rules, but they will not sort of solve every case. But I think it's different with when the lawyers look at themselves. They want to be correct. They should have the right answer. They are paid to deliver the right answer. So, it's very, very deep into the role of being a lawyer, and as you say you don't work as a lawyer, you're a lawyer. It's a very strong culture in the profession.

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Nick Hawtin

I mean, it is exactly what the four old, law medicine, the church and the military, that it is something you are as opposed to something you do. We talk about roles, and sometimes, perhaps, it may be unrealistic to expect the lawyers to be perfect at this task. I work a lot with innovation and start-ups, and we talk about three separate roles: the hipster, the hacker and the hustler. So, somebody that understands the users, somebody that understands how that business and somebody who understands how to build it.

When we talk about developers and lawyers not understanding each other. And should we not perhaps stick a third person into the mix?

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Ulf Lindén

Exactly. So, I think that is what we have seen from our projects, where we have sort of a strong middle person who could translate the ideas of the lawyers and to present something that the code has actually can code. That is when we have a good success. And that role is not that easy. Because you need to understand the law and also the user experience and the business. And you also need to have the same language as the coders and know how to present, the specifications for the coders.

So, I think that is the profession of the future, to be that the middle person who can translate the requirements from the lawyers and make specifications for the coders.

I don't think that we should have lawyers that can code. That is not really, you know, you want good lawyers, but you need good coders. You shouldn't do both things

I mean, you have a lot of start-up experience. You know what, what does that middle person in a non-legal tech start up?

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Nick Hawtin

We were talking earlier with common friend and colleague Andrea Lindblom, and she purposely perhaps did not use the word soft skills because as anybody who's ever had to fire somebody knows there's nothing soft about the process of firing another human being from their job, let alone if it's in a business like ours, where you are what you do.

I think the personal skills are extremely important, and it's a very case by case, often industry by industry.

I think you've built a couple of these products. Do you have any examples of somebody that's made a difference? I mean something I'm seeing with some firms, that we talked about earlier today, is some of the legal techs that are coming more from, a digital first E-commerce background stronger on the coders, they're choosing to focus on digital-first companies, so they're almost picking their customers. I think in this space they are avoiding the problem by almost avoiding the lawyers. But if you've got these two cultures, you've got these two parts. Do you have some examples of issues you've solved that person has solved for you?

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Ulf Lindén

From my experience, I think of 2 projects and in one of these cases, we had a project leader on the technical side who was really interested in the legal stuff. And he actually did a great job in in converting the lawyers, ifs and buts, into something that became coachable. And he created a very simple table. I mean, if your lawyers, you follow and you should apply the law, you have the sort of the ground rule, and then you have the exception from the rule and you have the exception from the exception. And, you know, it becomes really complex to describe how this legislation actually works because you have all these references, different exemptions. But this guy, he actually translated that into a very smart table from that we could, you know, put into the hands of the coders. So, there we have a tech guy who was moving into the sort of the legal space and really trying to understand the law, and it worked out perfectly

Another situation I'm thinking of is our current CEO of LegalBuddy, who is a lawyer by training. But he has spent about 10 years in project managing legal IT projects, and he also have that sort of middle person role, which is so important for those projects.

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Nick Hawtin

I'm thinking you know, you need some lawyers that are open to technology, and you need coders that are open to working with and often times, I think they often have a lot more similarity with each other. Coders want code to be nice, clean, small, tight. It's never perfect, and there's always

little bits they want to polish on it. They want to make it perfect.

But I think perhaps older, more experienced coders who have been forced to accept imperfect coding keep it running,

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Ulf Lindén

I know what you're saying. We have, for example, lawyers who think they are more or less artists. They are artists in creating contracts and drafting clauses. They have a great pride in that skill. I think you have the same with coders that they also have that that craftsmanship and the pride of creating the perfect code. So, in that way, the lawyers and coders all have some similarities.

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Nick Hawtin

Joel Spolsky, who's a bit of a guru in programming, has a famous line about Microsoft Excel, which is famously complicated, convoluted code, which he says that the amazing thing about Excel is not that it's, you know, very dense and hard to understand, the amazing thing is that it still works that you can read spreadsheets from 1995. You can still read them on your computer today, whether it's a Mac or it's Microsoft Windows. That's the genius of it, and that the genius of their software engineers is that they can hold all these abstract conflicts in mind at the same time, which in many ways is the law, I mean that there's a lot of conflicts and contradictions and exceptions. And yet, once you reach a certain level of expertise in the business, you can keep all those balls in the air and see the opportunities.

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Ulf Lindén

Yeah, that's an interesting reflection.

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Nick Hawtin

Well, I think you guys have more, I think, have more in common than perhaps they think.

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Ulf Lindén

Yeah, they just need to find the common language. Once you have that, it's amazing how much lawyers and coders can do together. But that collaboration is so important.

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Nick Hawtin

We're focused too much, as perhaps we do on the conflict, rather than on the many, many, many similarities.

That was brilliant. Thank you very much, Ulf. We're out of time here.

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Ulf Lindén

Thank you for having me.

00:16:18,929

Nick Hawtin

Thank you to listening to us. My name is Nick Hawtin, and this is the Copenhagen Legal Tech lab Podcast.

00:16:25,960 - Outro

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